

Focus: Last developments on the Ukraine crisis [EN](#) [EN](#) [EN](#) [EN](#)

Last developments and current status on the Ukraine crisis

The Ukraine crisis, who emerged after the gathering of Russian troops at the Ukrainian border, does not look close to an end. The occidental parties are working on a diplomatic solution, while sending signals of support and military troops or equipment to the Eastern countries.

On the diplomatic front, after a first encounter at the beginning of January, the United States and Russia, through the Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergueï Lavrov, met on January 21st in Geneva. As expected, no major breakthrough, but both countries are “on a good path to understand each other’s worries and positions” and will meet again in February, stated Mr. Blinken.

The European allies have also activated their diplomatic formats, after worries concerning how far President Joe Biden was ready to go to defend Ukraine, when he implied that a minor incursion from Russia in Ukraine would only provoke a minor reaction. A “Normandy Format” meeting was organised between France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine on January 26th to support the current ceasefire, and agreed to meet again 2 weeks later.

The EU Parliament also sent a 9-members delegation, currently in Ukraine, to show the support of the Union to the country.

On the military aspects, a difference of perception of the situation remains between the European allies and the United States. The first ones do not see an assault as imminent, whereas the latter have intelligence showing sign of a strong preparation, such as blood supplies for casualties.

In any case, the European countries have been sending equipment to Ukraine: The Baltic states have sent anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, with Washington’s authorisation, the United-Kingdom offered additional troops to NATO, and France gets ready to send hundreds of troops in Romania, while warning this was “not aimed to lead to any military escalation”.

On the other side, Ukraine has been the target of a cyberattack on January 14th that hit many Ukrainian state’s websites. Russia announced naval military manoeuvres that could gather up more than 140 ships and 60 airplanes, and has conducted a military exercise rehearsing repelling an external attack.

New meetings are planned in the coming weeks to find an answer to the warranties requested by Russia.

Industry (1/2)

Luxembourg finances the Incubation Forum for Circular Economy in European Defence [EN](#) [EN](#)

The Luxembourg Directorate of Defence has announced on January 27th that it will finance for €784.000 the Incubation Forum for Circular Economy in European Defence (IF CEED), launched by EDA in October 2021. This Forum aims, in the frame of the European Green Deal, to incubate, foster and promote innovation and lessons learnt on circular economy in defence, to tackle the climate challenges but also increased competition for raw materials that EU does not produce.

14th European Space Conference: Commissioner Thierry Breton announced a full programme for consolidating EU’s space ambition [EN](#)

The European Space Conference came back to Brussels on 25-26 January 2022 for its 14th edition. This year, the Conference gathered European space actors to exchange on “a new Era for European Space”. The discussions focused on the implementation of new frameworks and initiatives for Europe to remain a leader in space. The European Commissioner for the internal market, Thierry Breton, opened the European Space Conference. He presented his key priorities for the year to come. One of his priorities concerned the defence dimension of European space policy. The Commissioner Breton insisted on the need to enhance EU resilience in and from space and announced the creation of a Space & Defence Strategy as part of the Strategic Compass. This strategy would include the expansion of the defence dimension in current and future EU infrastructures; the reduction of technological dependencies and the establishment of a true European Space Command on the mid- to long-run. The strategy is to be put forward by next year.

Spain validates its participation in the MALE Eurodrone programme [ES](#)

France, Germany, Spain and Italy are together developing a European MALE drone. Since a first contract project in 2020, signed by France and Italy, and then Germany in April 2021 with budget approval, the budget was still to be confirmed for Spain. The Spanish Minister for Defence, on January 25th, agreed for the funding of 12 drones in 4 systems.

European Union military cooperation and external operations

Mali: Denmark leaves the Takuba Task Force, French ambassador expelled

Tension is rising between European countries and Mali. Following the call from the Malian government, France followed by some other European nations deployed troops to fight the terrorists groups in the Sahel region and train the local armed forces.

However, since August 2020, power has been taken by the military forces after a coup against President Ibrahim Keïta. Since then, the refusal of the new Head of State Colonel Assimi Goïta to organise elections and his contacts with Russia has put his European partners in an ambiguous situation.

On January 24th, the Malian authorities requested that Denmark withdraw its troops from the country, arguing that their deployment had not been authorised. The Takuba partners replied officially that an invitation was sent to Copenhagen in 2019, and accepted in June 2021. A version Mali is contesting, stating that they orally warned Denmark their request was under examination. The Danish Minister of Defence, Trine Bramsen declared that they had no more reason to stay if the Malian government was not requiring their help anymore. Given the situation, the 60 Danish special forces and their equipment were called back home, one week only after their arrival, leaving a capacity breach as Sweden was also planning to withdraw.

A few days later, on January 31st, the Malian authorities informed the French Ambassador Joël Meyer that he was invited to leave the country in the next 3 days. This follows recent declarations of the French Minister for Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian stating that the junta was "illegitimate" and "irresponsible". Mali is also under strong sanctions from the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) for its non-democratic power transition. This may lead France to reconsider even more its presence in the country, as it has already reduced its Barkhane operation forces by half since June 2021.

International relations

The EU takes a collective action against China in front of the WTO to defend Lithuania [EN](#)

The tensions that emerged between Lithuania and China last October 2021 are not cooling down. They were triggered by the support of Lithuania to launch a bilateral EU-Taiwan investment deal, and a visit from Lithuanians officials in the island, still considered by Beijing as a secessionist Chinese territory.

In December suspicions emerged of illegal trade practices by China, targeting exports and imports of goods to and from Lithuania. Josep Borrell's warnings now come to execution, and the EU has launched on January 27th a case at the World Trade Organisation over China's discriminatory practices. Valdis Dombrovskis, the Commissioner for Trade, stated that it comes after "repeated failed attempts to resolve the issue bilaterally", and that it is "not a case we take lightly". In parallel, the EU is strengthening its toolbox of autonomous measures for such cases, like an Anti-Coercition Instrument adopted by the Commission recently.

In Brest, France, informal meeting of EU Defence and Foreign Affairs ministers [EN](#)

On January 13th, EU Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs met informally in Brest, France, for a first gathering in the frame of the French presidency of the European Union Council. On the agenda were discussions about the Strategic Compass, a meeting with NATO and UN authorities, and a special session concerning contested spaces.

The Strategic Compass session was simply a status about the work still going on for this European Union White Book. A reinforced cooperation was agreed with NATO and the UN, with the project of a new joint declaration between EU and NATO.

On contested spaces, the French Defence Minister, Florence Parly, called for a European strategy about security and defence in space, and recalled the need to develop a more global maritime presence through increased coordination as well as joint EU ports of call.